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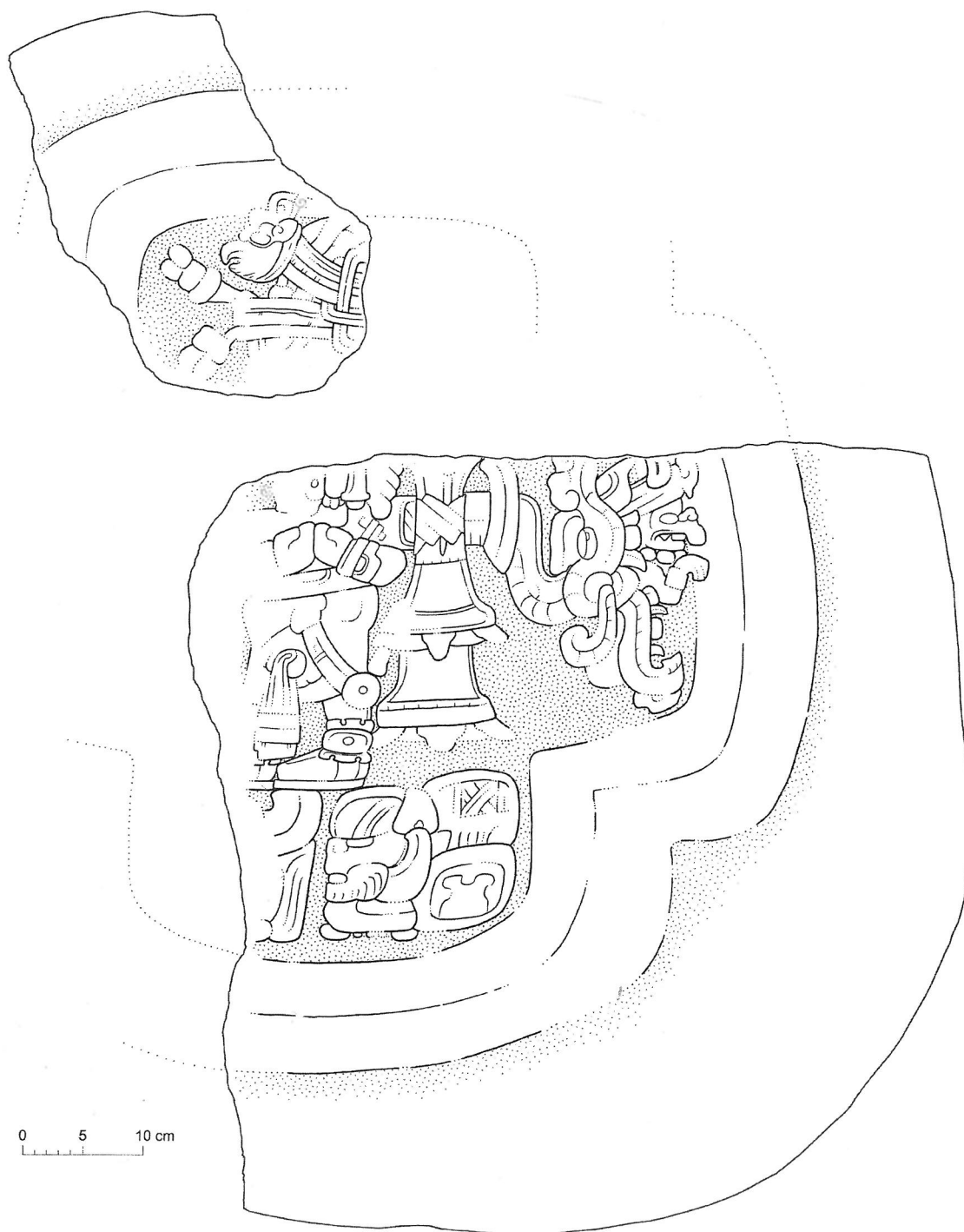
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Some Observations and New Discoveries Related to Altar 3, Pacbitun, Belize

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The Pre-Columbian Maya city of Pacbitun, Belize (Fig. 1) is distinguished by the high number of stone monuments (n~20) identified during the roughly three decades of archaeological research conducted there (Healy et al. 2004:213). Altar 3, recovered in a cache within the main pyramidal structure of the site in 1986, was one of those monuments, but, unlike most of the others from the site, it is carved and has a short hieroglyphic text. Yet, similar to several of the others, it had been broken in the past and, its pieces scattered. Archaeological excavations in 2016 recovered another piece of the same monument, this one having been used as part of a wall foundation in antiquity.

The Contexts of the Finds

First excavated by Healy, Pacbitun's Structure 1 is the central structure of the eastern triadic group dominating the eastern side of the Plaza A (Fig. 2). The excavations consisted a horizontal clearing trench across the summit, searching for remnants of a superstructure, and a 4 m wide, axial trench, running down the west face, from the summit to the plaza (Healy 1990a:251). The latter trench penetrated as much as 8 m into the core of the structure, exposing a series of earlier, encased buildings, representing at least five major phases of construction. The earliest phase identified dates to the Late Preclassic period (300–100 B.C.), the penultimate to the early Late Classic (A.D. 550–800) and the final to the late Late Classic (A.D. 800–900). The two intervening phases were constructed in the Early Classic period (A.D. 300–550; Healy 1990a:252). Several burials and caches were found within these excavations, including a large fragment of a carved monument, battered and broken, designated Altar 3. Made of distinctive and fine-grained yellowish limestone, this monument fragment was buried intentionally within Phase 2 deposits and represents approximately 40% of the original monument (by surface area). As recovered it measures 65.3 cm wide, 64.6 cm high and c. 18 cm thick (all maximal measurements). Originally the monument may have had an irregular outline resembling a rounded square, measuring c. 96 cm wide and 100 cm high. The materials of the associated construction fill (Lot 31) suggest the altar was purposefully cached in a phase of architecture dated to the later facet of the Early Classic period (A.D. 400–550). As no additional fragments of this altar had been recovered, and considering its partial and fragmentary state, it remained little more than a passing comment in the publications of the site (Healy 1990a: 254, 257; Healy et al. 2004:213). The iconography and epigraphy was eventually examined further, and attempts were made to set it in a wider context (Helmke et al. 2004; Helmke and Awe 2008:73–75).

All of this changed when a new fragment of Altar 3 was discovered during the senior author's 2016 season of excavations of the palatial group focusing on a range structure designated Structure 25. This building defines the eastern side of Courtyard 1 (Fig. 2) and was cleared by a series of axial excavations. Exposing and following walls to define the architectural footprint of the structure led to the discovery of the new altar fragment (in Excavation Unit 16-B-25-21), recognized as part of Altar 3 due to the same yellowish limestone and having the same broad quatrefoil frame. This fragment had been recycled as building material, its distinct colouration setting it apart from the other facing stones. Measuring c. 12.6 cm wide, 17.2 cm high, and c. 20 cm thick, the fragment had been used as a facing stone within the basal course of the central spine wall. It was found upright, placed on one of its broken edges, and integrated into the western face of the spine wall of the north-western room of Str. 25. The northern wall abuts the fragment at a perpendicular angle, forming a corner in the room. Its carved side faced east into the masonry, its plain, albeit red-stained, underside faced west into the room (Fig. 3). The fragment was set in such a way that its rounded exterior edge was upright and abutting the northern wall, and one of the breaks resting on the floor below.

This construction phase was built upon a plaster floor, found to continue under the northern wall, indicating that it is a partition wall added subsequently. A dense ceramic cluster, designated Ceramic Scatter 1, was found atop this plaster floor, directly in front of the spine wall incorporating the monument fragment. This feature consisted predominantly of Late Classic period sherds, including those assigned to Mount Maloney Black, Dolphin Head Red, Cayo Unslipped types, and Belize Red group types (Gifford 1976). Test excavations reaching a depth of c. 3.2 m below this floor revealed a series of architectural features including a bench and two superimposed floors above a significant deposit of dry-laid boulder core 1.70 m thick. Whereas the ceramics from the upper floors suggest a Late Classic period date, the materials recovered within the boulder core—polychrome ceramics with geometric designs, and pseudoglyphs—belong typologically to the Tiger Run ceramic complex (c. A.D. 550–700) (Gifford 1976), a date corroborated by a carbon assay of charcoal recovered elsewhere from the base of this layer (i.e., Beta Analytic #443542 Cal A.D. 640–675). A midden layer below the boulder core contained sherds from the Late Preclassic. As such, the bulk of the architecture of Str. 25 clearly postdates the Early Classic period and the wall containing the fragment of Altar 3 may well date to the initial facet of the Late Classic. As such an eighth century date for the construction of this phase of Str. 25 is probable.

With the discovery of the new fragment, we have gone back to consider the larger fragment recovered from the core of Str. 1. The new fragment greatly helps us flesh out the original size of the altar and the configuration of its iconographic programme, assuming the iconography was disposed symmetrically. Documentation of these two fragments under raking light has allowed us to produce a more complete drawing of the monument, illustrating the details of the iconography and its associated epigraphy (Fig. 4). Below we comment on the iconography and epigraphy, and provide stylistic assessments of the altar's date of manufacture based on a combination of traits.

Description of the Iconography

The iconographic programme decorating the upper surface of Altar 3 is enclosed within a bold quatrefoil frame. This motif usually frames scenes that are deemed retrospective or somehow involve supernatural settings, as if looking onto one realm from another (see Guernsey 2010; Stone and Zender 2011:26, 231). As such, this monument is reminiscent in general terms of the so-called Motmot Marker at Copan (A.D. 441), and the incised peccary skull (dated to A.D. 633) from the same site, as well as later examples at Copan (the markers of the II-B ballcourt and Mon. 131), Tikal (Altar 4), Caracol (Altar 13), El Perú (altar of Stela 38), and Quirigua (Altars R and Q), all showing otherworldly scenes framed within such quatrefoils (see Jones and Satterthwaite 1982; Fash 1991; Freidel et al. 1993:215; Baudez 1994). Interest-

ingly, the majority of Giant Ajaw altars at Caracol are all enclosed within such quatrefoil signs (see Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981) (Fig. 5), and by virtue of proximity may well be the closest analogue to the altar at Pacbitun.¹ In this respect it is also noteworthy that the Caracol altars date between A.D. 495–652, which may be significant with regard to the dating of Altar 3.

The medial square of this quatrefoil is dominated by a prominent figure, undoubtedly a ruler of Pacbitun, standing in a characteristic Early Classic posture: torso turned forward to the viewer, head turned to the side, peering over the right shoulder, arms folded over the chest, clenched fists up against each other, and feet pointed forward and slightly overlapping (see Proskouriakoff 1950:19–21, Fig. 17, Type IA1-a). This general posture is known from several other sites, prompting Flora Clancy (pers. comm. 1988) to propose a range of dates between A.D. 435 (9.0.0.0.0) and 495 (9.3.0.0.0), for the carving of this monument, based on the combination of stylistic features.

The belt assemblage includes a distinctive pendant chain hanging at the figure's heels (see Proskouriakoff 1950:Fig. 23, IX-D1t) and the bandaging of the sandals at the ankles, marked by a circular element framed by two elements resembling *na* syllabograms (see Proskouriakoff 1950:Fig. 28, XI-F1d). Similar belt chains are seen at Uxbenka (Stela 11), and especially at Tikal (Stela 1, 2, 28, 35 and 39) (Fig. 6), whereas precisely the same type of anklet is seen at Uolantun (Stela 1) (see Jones and Satterthwaite 1982; Leventhal 1992).

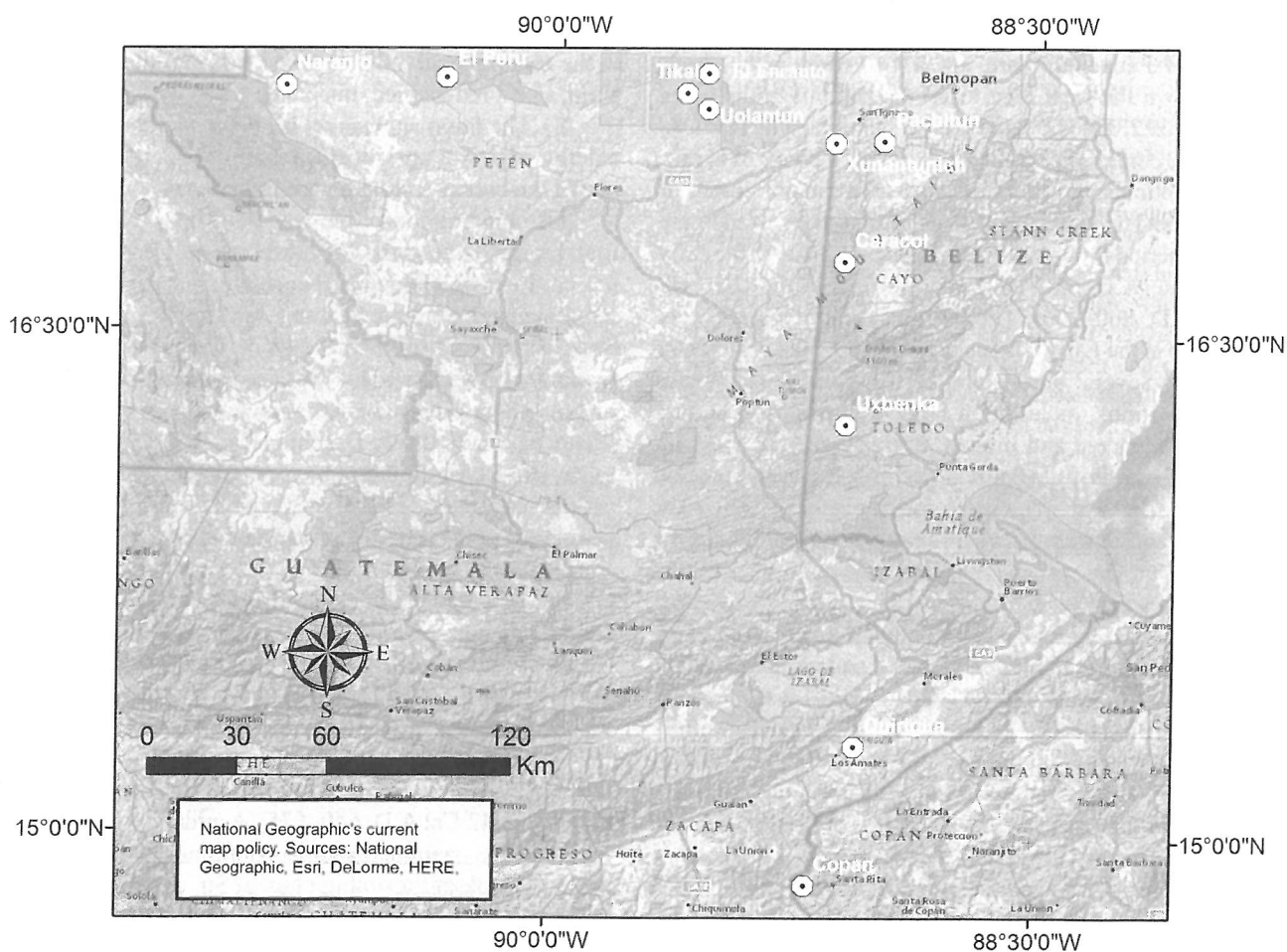


Fig. 1. Map of the central Maya lowlands showing the location of Pacbitun, Belize and all sites mentioned in the text (map by Sheldon Skaggs).

The dates recorded on these monuments range between A.D. 376–504, which, although a broader time span, accords well with the stylistic range of Altar 3 discussed above.

Filling much of the scene is a large bicephalic ceremonial bar. The right lobe is quite well preserved, whereas that which would have been found within the left lobe has not been re-

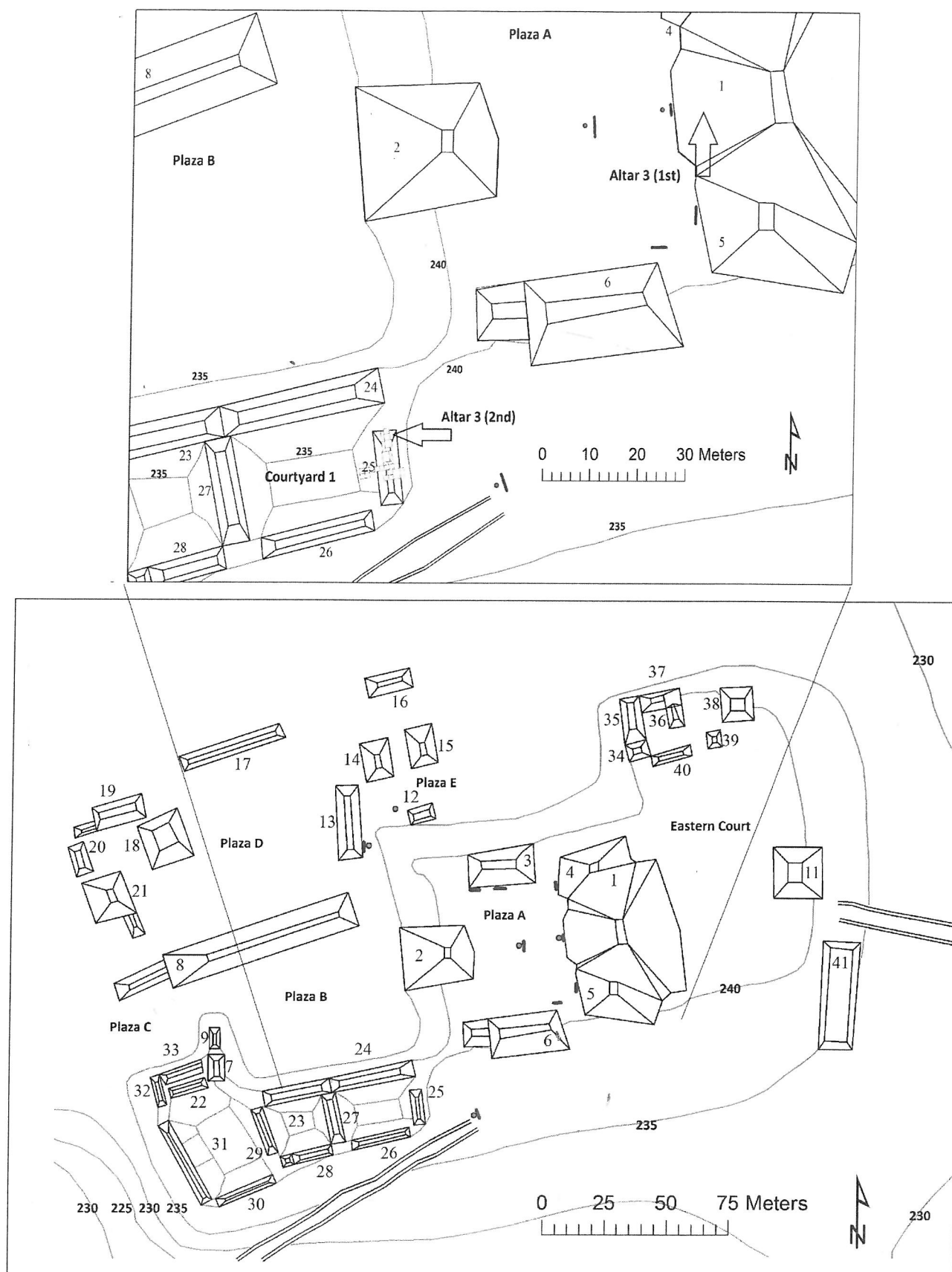


Fig. 2. Site map of the core area of Pacbitun, with close up of locations of Altar 3 find locations (map by Sheldon Skaggs).

covered. Unlike Late Classic examples wherein such bars are depicted as rigid, the one here appears to be made of flexible and almost life-like material, suggesting the serpentine creature was considered sentient and alive. Such ambiguity is typical of Early Classic iconography with many examples showing kings clutching to their breast the sinuous body of a serpentine creature. Similar instances are known particularly from Copan (Stela 1, 2, 35 and E) (Fig. 7) and the Leiden Plaque (see Baudez 1994; Morley and Morley 1939). Between the ruler and the head of the being is a sequence of large trapezoidal forms that appear to represent cloth-like material, bound to the body of the snake, with large cloth sashes fluttering upwards and cascading down from the creature's midriff. The being has wide open maws, with a prominent set of irregular dentition, fangs alternating between molars, and at the very top, a larger incisor in the shape of a shark's tooth with markings of obsidian.



Fig. 3. Photo of Structure 25 excavations showing Altar 3 fragment at end of spine wall. Altar location circled in lower left (photograph by Sheldon Skaggs).

Clearly this was a fearsome beast and from its open gape emerges another more diminutive supernatural entity. This anthropomorphic being with prognathic face, wears a necklace and headdress and leans outwards with folded hand as if tepidly sensing its new milieu. Most frequently the entity appearing from such serpentine maws is the deity *K'awiil*, a personification of lightning and royal authority (Helmke and Awe 2016:14–15; see also Valencia Rivera 2015). Nonetheless, other deities are depicted emerging from ceremonial bars, as seen for example on Pacbitun Stela 6 (Helmke et al. 2006:72, Fig. 2), and this may be the case here also, especially since the flaming axe-head usually lodged in the forehead of *K'awiil* is not present.

The new fragment shows part of the large headdress filling most of the upper lobe of the quatrefoil. The central element represents tightly woven strands attached to a tabular element from the end of which splay two large beaded elements. At the very front of the headdress, almost like a figurehead, is the head of an avian entity. The shape of the beak identifies it as a bird of prey, whereas the beard of feathers and the distinctive ear mark it as a type of owl. This owl shares some of

the features of the mythical *muwaan* bird (Miller and Taube 1993:121), and also that which serves as the head-variant of the logogram *ch'een*, for 'cave' (see Helmke 2009:544–552) (Fig. 8), although the example on Altar 3 does not exhibit the distinctive trilobate eye of the cave owl. In many other examples we see the names of kings spelled in their headdresses and this may be the case here also.²

Comments on the Epigraphy

An assessment of the manner in which the extant fragments conjoin coupled with a description of the iconography makes it clear that the entirety of the medial section as well as the three upper lobes of the quatrefoil were all brimming with iconography. This leaves the lower lobe to be filled by a very succinct caption, which once comprised two glyph blocks. That at the left (A1) is very fragmentary, but from what remains we can see part of a *yu* syllabogram at the top. The remaining portions of signs below are too indistinct to read. Presumably this helped name the figure represented on the altar. What is distinctive about the *yu* syllabogram is that its bow is rendered as doubled, which is characteristic of early examples of this sign (Helmke and Nielsen 2013:Fig. 9). Nevertheless, due to the paucity of securely dated examples, the temporal interval that can be offered for this particular variant spans between A.D. 445–633 (see Helmke and Nielsen 2013:153, 160). This relatively late span should be considered provisional at present, since it is based on very few securely dated examples, and especially as other early occurrences are known, although these are not associated with clear dates (see Grube and Martin 2001:34–36, 41).

The second glyph block (B1) records a toponym, and most likely provides the original place-name of Pacbitun in antiquity, as has been suggested in earlier studies (Helmke et al. 2004; Helmke and Awe 2008:73–74). This conclusion is based on the incidence of the segment *chan-ch'een*, or literally, 'sky-cave', which is a poetic locative expression that follows many toponyms in Maya writing (see Stuart and Houston 1994:11–13; Tokovinine 2008:39, 141–158; Helmke 2009:83–86). Together this pairing of elements probably serves as a metaphor for 'realm,' with the preceding segment providing the proper name of the place. Here the initial portion of the toponym is written with the head of a gopher, functioning as the logogram **BAH**, followed by a small moon crescent **ja** that may function as to spell the suffix *-aj*. This rather unusual spelling is also seen on Stela 39 at Tikal (Ap3a) and on a stone bowl in the Dumbarton Oaks collections, where the same lexeme *baah-aj* is intended, as is made clear by the context (Fig. 9c). Below the gopher head on Altar 3 is what may be a simplified **ni** as well as traces of a **la** syllabogram, that has been made visible by raking light and new inspection of the monument. Together the toponym may thus be read *bajniil*, involving apocope of the lexeme and a syncopation of the penultimate vowel and a locative suffix *-iil*. The latter is a suffix found on a series of place names, indicating that a particular feature occurs at this location (see Lacadena and Wichmann n.d.:16–19).³ What may be the same toponym occurs in the caption to a captive depicted on Stela 21 at Caracol. This caption may designate the captive as a ruler of Pacbitun, one *Chanal Chak Wak* (?), seized by the king of Caracol in A.D. 702 (Helmke and Awe 2012:69).

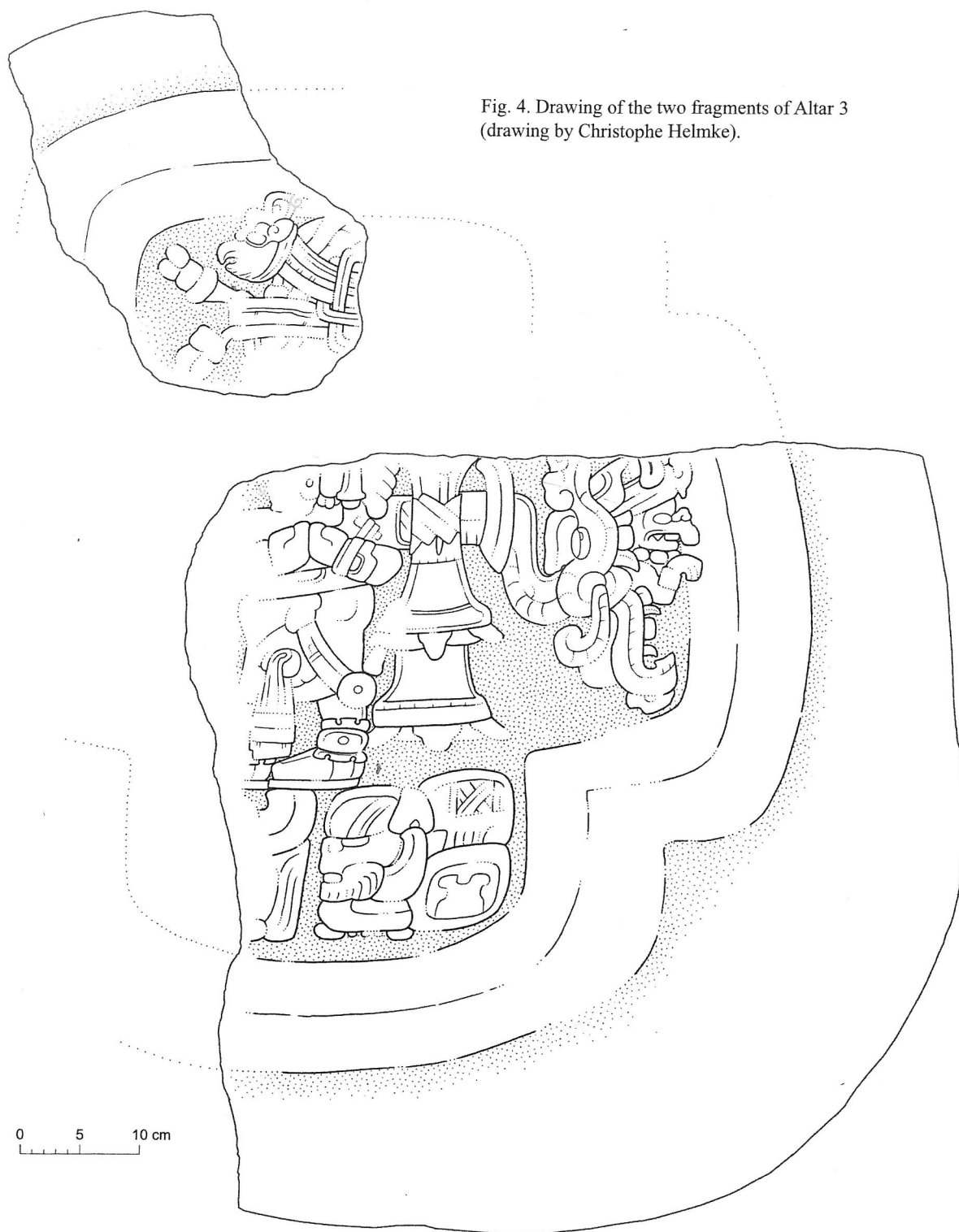


Fig. 4. Drawing of the two fragments of Altar 3 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

Returning to the text of Altar 3, the ‘gopher’ logogram as well as that for ‘cave’, both exhibit stylistic features useful for paleographic assessment. In the first case, the forehead of the gopher is marked by a large mirror-like sign and the mandible is demarcated separately (Fig. 9). These two features distinguish this particular allograph from other variants, allowing us to propose a dating based on this sign. Other well dated examples of this sign are found on monuments dated to between A.D. 376–573, ranging from Stela 39 at Tikal to Stela 1 at El Encanto (see Helmke and Nielsen 2013:150,

155). The only diagnostic element of the ‘cave’ sign is an upright human long bone and this particular allograph dates to between A.D. 376–534, with Stela 39 at Tikal and Stela 16 at Caracol providing the temporal boundaries (see Helmke 2009:560–562). As such, this span appears as the most likely for the production of this text, since this represents the overlap of these two paleographic features. The latter half of this rather broad range may be the more probable, remembering the range provided by the *yu* syllabogram that can be securely dated to after A.D. 445. Thus, on the basis of paleographic



Fig. 5. Caracol, Altar 19, a Giant Ajaw showing the dedicatory date 1 Ajaw within a quatrefoil frame (after Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981: Fig. 43c).

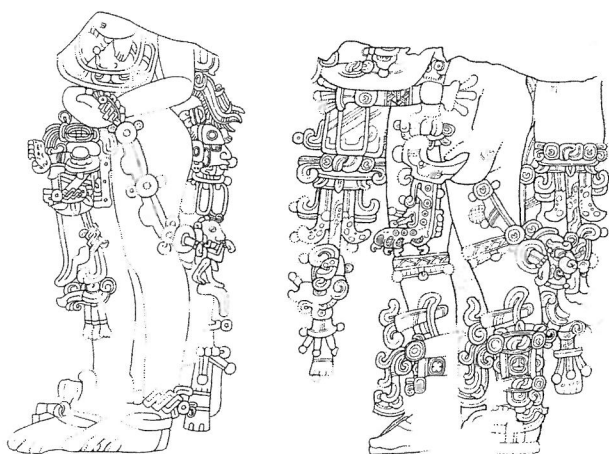


Fig. 6. Examples of Early Classic belt chains (shaded) from Ux-benka (Stela 11, left) and Tikal (Stela 35, right) (drawings by John Montgomery and Linda Schele).

features we can assign Altar 3 a date of manufacture between A.D. 445–534, a range that accords extremely well with the style date offered independently by Flora Clancy, which spans from A.D. 435–495. To this we can also recall the dedicatory date of Stela 6, the other prominent Early Classic carved monument of Pacbitun, dating to A.D. 485 (Helmke et al. 2006; see also Healy 1990b). As such, it is not inconceivable that these two monuments may well have formed a stela and altar pair, as originally suggested by Healy.

Discussion and Summary Remarks

The various assessments made of the iconography and epigraphy put us on more secure footing to determine the date of the altar's manufacture. Nevertheless, it is clear that at some later juncture the monument was fractured and deposited in secondary contexts at various locations throughout the site core. The destruction of the monument may well have been the result of an intentional act, since the entirety of the head



Fig. 7. Copan, Stela 35 showing the sinuous and curving serpentine ceremonial bar braced by the monarch (drawing by Barbara Fash).

of the ruling figure is broken off and what little remains of his face is completely effaced. This treatment compares to the defacement of monuments at many sites throughout the Maya Lowlands (Harrison-Buck 2016), including at Xunantunich, where each and every figure depicted on stelae has had its eyes gouged out and the face mutilated (Helmke et al. 2010:99). The wilful defacement of the Xunantunich monuments evidently occurred at the end of the site's occupation, perhaps around the time of its abandonment, or the fall of the royal dynasty, considering the late date of these monuments, which are all squarely dated to the Terminal Classic (ranging between A.D. 810–849).

However, at Pacbitun, Altar 3 is clearly an Early Classic monument and the same social processes cannot be invoked to account for its fragmentation, dispersal and secondary re-deposition. It is also worthwhile remembering that Stela 6 was found lying face up on the surface of the terminal Plaza A floor, disassociated from its butt (Helmke et al. 2006:71–72). Perhaps the fracturing and dispersal of Altar 3, as well as the displacement of Stela 6, occurred at the same time, and were brought about by the same action. Considering the eventual

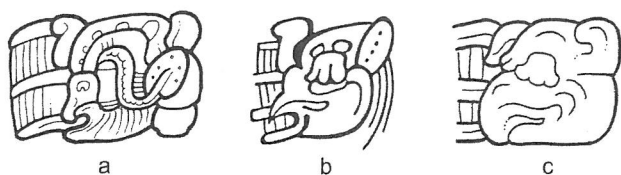


Fig. 8. Examples of the *ch'een* head-variant glyph for 'cave': a) Tikal, Marcador, b) Hombre de Tikal, c) Dos Pilas, Hieroglyphic Stair 4 (drawings by Stephen Houston and Federico Fahsen).

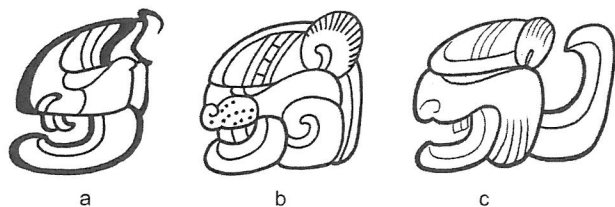


Fig. 9. Examples of early variants of the gopher logogram: a) Hombre de Tikal, b) Tikal, Stela 31, c) Dumbarton Oaks limestone bowl (drawings by Christophe Helmke and Alexandre Tokovinine).

re-deposition of these monuments in secondary contexts, and the apparent reverential interment of the larger fragment of Altar 3 within Str. 1, we may be witnessing the results of warfare and its aftermath. Similar scenarios have been offered to explain the fracturing of Early Classic monuments at Tikal, perhaps as part of the infamous attack by Caracol in A.D. 562, and the reverential burial of fractured and splintered monuments within the architectural core of later temples (see Houston 1991; Schele and Freidel 1990:198–204).

Such a scenario has merit here also, since the local dynasty endured this warring period of the sixth century. In fact, the new fragment of Altar 3 has been found recycled in architecture, as if spolia, and the construction can be dated by means of associated ceramics and by carbon assays to the start of the Late Classic period. As such, Altar 3 must have been fractured before this time. The best known conflicts in the area are those that pitted Tikal against Caracol, especially the axe-event of A.D. 556 and the famed star-war event of A.D. 562 (see Martin 2005). In light of the probable dates of Altar 3 and Stela 6, and considering these conflicts, it may be that Pacbitun was somehow embroiled between these two giants, resulting in an attack on the site and the destruction of its most prominent monuments. Additionally, the remaining uncached fragments of Altar 3 may have been broken as part of the A.D. 702 attack on Pacbitun at the hands of Caracol, at a time when the latter was attempting to extend its influence into the Belize Valley (Helmke and Awe 2008:84–86). These ambitions were eventually rebuffed, with the growing influence of the kings of Naranjo, who eagerly sought alliances with the polities of the Belize Valley, particularly during the regency of Lady Six Sky and the reign of her son *K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk* (A.D. 693–726+) (Helmke and Awe 2008:79–84). Concurrently, picking up the pieces, the Pacbitun dynasty set about to bury the shattered portraits of their illustrious forebears, with a portion of Altar 3 deposited within Str. 25. What has transpired with the remaining, as yet undiscovered fragments is unknown, but it is likely these too are buried in other structures throughout the site.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

1. These include (in chronological order): Altars 4 (495), 1 (534), 3 (534), 14 (534), 6 (573), 11 (613), 15 (613), 19 (633), and 7 (652) (see Beetz and Satterthwaite 1982).
2. As a name that may have involved either Muwaan, or Ch'een this would duplicate some of the onomastic patterns of the area, as exemplified by names of Tikal individuals (e.g. K'inich Muwaan Jo'l) and those of the north-eastern Peten (e.g. Yuhkno'm Ch'een) (see Martin and Grube 2000:56, 103, 108–109).
3. As such a possible etymology for this place name could be 'where there are gophers', although this has to be considered provisional in the absence of other examples of the same toponym at Pacbitun.

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Abstract: On-going work by the Pacbitun Regional Archaeological Project has brought to light considerable new information on early architecture in Plaza A, associated artefacts, and carved monuments. Discovered during the 2016 field season, in Structure 25, within the palatial group, a new fragment of Altar 3 prompts us to reconsider the dating, stylistic attributes, iconographic program and epigraphy of this important monument. Here, we present a new drawing of the monument and comment on the temporal incidence of the iconography's stylistic attributes and touch on paleographic features of the epigraphy. Together these data provide us with important information concerning Early Classic kingship at Pacbitun, against which the secondary contexts wherein the fragments of this monument were found can be gauged, thereby beginning to sketch out some of the historical benchmarks of this monument's life-history.

Resumen: Trabajos en curso por el Proyecto Arqueológico Regional de Pacbitun ha sacado a la luz nueva información sobre arquitectura temprana en la Plaza A, así como artefactos asociados, y los monumentos grabados. Descubierta durante la temporada de campo de 2016, en la Estructura 25, dentro del grupo palaciego, un nuevo fragmento del Altar 3 nos lleva a reconsiderar la datación, los atributos estilísticos, el programa iconográfico y la epigrafía de este importante monumento. A continuación, presentamos

un nuevo dibujo del monumento y comentarios sobre la incidencia temporal de los atributos estilísticos de la iconografía y tocamos en las características paleográficas de la epigrafía. En conjunto, estos datos nos proporcionan información importante relacionada con la realeza del Clásico Temprano en Pacbitun, contra los cuales los contextos secundarios en el que se encontraron los fragmentos de este monumento se pueden estimar, y por lo tanto empezar a esbozar algunos de los puntos mayores de la historia de la trayectoria histórica de este monumento.

Zusammenfassung: Die laufenden Forschungen des Regionalen Archäologischen Projekts Pacbitun haben neue Informationen über die frühe Architektur in Plaza A gebracht, und dabei Artefakte, sowie skulptierte Steinmonumente zu Tage geführt. Ein neues Fragment des Altar 3, welches während der Feldkampagne 2016 innerhalb von Struktur 25, der Palastgruppe, gefunden wurde macht es notwendig die Datierung und stilistischen Attribute sowie das ikonographische Programm und die Epigraphik dieses wichtigen Denkmals zu analysieren. Wir präsentieren eine neue Zeichnung des Monuments und äußern uns über die chronologischen Muster der ikonographischen stilistischen Attribute. Wir kommentieren auch die paläographischen Merkmale der Schriftzeichen. Kombiniert liefern uns diese Daten wichtige Informationen über das frühe klassische Königtum in Pacbitun. Diese können dazu dienen, die Kontexte in denen die Fragmente dieses Denkmals gefunden wurden besser zu verstehen. Somit können wir beginnen einige der historischen Umstände der Biographie des Monuments zu skizzieren.

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Burning Bodies during Maya Censer Rituals. New Insights from Monumental Sculptures and Skeletal Remains from Yucatan, Mexico

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Human sacrifice (or animal sacrifice for that sake) has long been recognized both in the ancient Maya iconography and the archaeological record. However, it was not until the last decade that discursive information and material evidence have been more thoroughly correlated to benefit a deeper understanding of the ritual choreographies, occasions, and meanings for ritual human killings and subsequent body treatments (Baudez 2004; Chinchilla et. al. 2015; Houston and Scherer 2010; Scherer 2015a; Tiesler and Cucina 2007; 2010). Many of these reconstructed ritual progressions include the fire exposure of human bodies on burners.

The main goal of this paper is to present and discuss scenes of ritual fire exposure of fleshed bodies depicted in the Northern Maya Lowlands and relate these to particular ritual complexes. We will focus on Terminal Classic and Postclassic contexts (A.D. 800–1500) from the Yucatán peninsula, where the sacrificial fire consumption of children and adults appears much more widespread than previously thought. In contrast to mythological scenes on vessels (cf. Scherer 2015a: 141–147), we shall rely on four case studies of reminiscent scenes displayed on public monumental imagery and shall confront these with ethnohistorical references and fire-exposed human deposits from public plazas of major peninsular Maya urban centers.

Four Sculpted Burning Scenes from Yucatán

Door jamb painting, Tohcok, Campeche

This well-known example of human censer burning comes from a painted doorjamb from Tohcok in Campeche (Prosk-

ouriakoff 1965: Fig. 13; Fig. 1). The protagonist is depicted as the so-called Jaguar God of the Underworld. Garbed with loin cloth and jaguar feet, his body appears painted black, while his thighs show sun (*k'ihn*) signs (cf. Taube 1998:441). Displayed in a dancing pose (cf.Looper 2009:53), the priest holds a (flexible) shield and a larger weapon with several flint blades, while he faces a youngster, probably a child. The latter lies prone on top of a spiked censer filled with kindling matter, its torso being consumed by flames. Above or behind the minor's back emerge crossed pinewood bundles together with a sign resembling either the „child-of-father” glyph or a face from which flames emerge. It is of note that crossed pinewood torches and a face compose the glyph T600 (Thompson's number), a sign that is read as *wi te nah* (literally “tree-root-house”). This compound has been interpreted to designate a place name as well as a title tied to the ritual foundation of palaces, in which it expresses the vitalization (or animation) of a building (Stuart 2004:236–238). More recently, a Teotihuacan origin of *wi te nah* has been suggested (Fash et. al. 2009). In its original connotation, this sign may allude to the Pyramid of the Sun and an early version of New Fire ceremonies, which centuries later were celebrated among the Aztecs for example, when the ritual and the solar calendar would coincide each 52 years. Unfortunately, the longer inscription accompanying the ritual scene was already heavily damaged when documented and only certain segments can be read, among them the expression *waxaklahun u baah* (block p3), a possible allusion to a kind of fantastic creature from Teotihuacan, which the Maya also considered to be a war serpent (Houston and Scherer 2010:171, Taube 2000). The date

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